

## “CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASIA”

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### **Abstract:**

Education creates “Human Capital” and Social Capital”. Higher Education Institutions, Colleges and Universities have played a significant role in the economic and social development of the nations and will continue to do so. However, their role will become increasingly significant in view of internationalization and globalization of higher education.

Present and future scenario in respect of higher education in Asia, the strategies to be adopted for establishing Higher Education institutions and for their expansion, key performance indicators of Higher Education and how Higher Education institutions become key drivers for economic and societal development are presented in this paper.

The challenges facing Higher Education such as huge investments, equity and inclusiveness consistent with quality providing relevant education and training are also highlighted in this paper.

### **Keywords:**

Higher Education, Strategies, Key Performance Indicators, Gross Enrollment Ratio, Challenges facing Higher Education, Equity, Inclusiveness and Affordability.

## **1. Importance of Higher Education**

“Higher education is the modern world’s basic education, but many countries are falling further and further behind”. [1,2] A recent World Bank study [3,4] indicates that the role of Higher Education as key driver for economic and societal development is now widely recognized. Higher education is increasingly seen as a priority in the policies of many developing countries. “Higher education is no longer a luxury, but it is essential for survival”.

Higher education in developing countries should be accepted and recognized as a part of the national policy by the Governments and should be supported by all the relevant stakeholders such as ministries, industries, trade, commerce and society. Higher education helps in capacity building of the human capital and its potential. It is important that such capacity building activities are seen as not only a key driver for economic and societal development in one’s own country but also a necessity for facilitating the building of relevant international capacity and institutional innovation.

The world's economy is changing as knowledge supplants physical capital as a source of present and future wealth. As knowledge becomes more important, so does higher education. Therefore, the quality of knowledge generated through higher education and its availability to the wider economy, is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness.

Urgent action needs to be initiated to expand the higher education, in quantity consistent with the quality. The strengths of all players, public and private must be used, with the international community at large emerging to provide strong and coordinated support and leadership in this critical area.

However, higher education and establishing higher education institutions especially in developing countries, is a **complex phenomenon**.<sup>[5]</sup> It is an on-going process that must be based on a national priority and its contribution to economic, societal and political development must be well understood, recognized and articulated.

## **2. Scenario of Higher Education in Asia, Present and Future:**

**Higher education in Asia is characterized by**

- **Rapid expansion**

Quantitative expansion resulting in increasing the accessibility; Enrollment in higher education has increased many folds as much as by 3 to 6 times in the last 3 decades.

- **New Forms of Knowledge**

Diversity of programmes offered, conventional and innovative programmes, curricular reforms, immediate requirements of industry and world of work to compete in global market; China in particular, has been identified as Factory of the World.

- **New Delivery Mechanisms**

In addition to regular class room instructions, Virtual Universities, adoption of multi-media instructions, satellite and TV media, distance education and targeting especially women and housewives open learning leading to universal access of higher education and exploiting the potential of ICT in knowledge dissemination.

- **Globalization and Internationalization**

Providing educational opportunities to foreign nationals and sponsoring one's own students for Study Abroad Programmes and enabling them to pursue higher education in other Asian countries by sponsoring them with scholarships, and faculty and students exchanges.

- **Policy Responses:**

Inability of Governments to keep up with the tradition that higher education should continue to be under the domain of Government/Public funding; Corporatization of public universities and establishment of more and more private universities are some of the emerging trends; Diversified formulas for institutional financing, and robust models of public-private partnerships are to be developed.

- **Quality Concerns**

Whether universities and higher education institutions and their programmes should conform to global standards and norms (International Accreditation) or to meet local needs of the industry, communes and society.

- **Relevance of the programmes:**

In this context, are the roles of Universities to be redefined. The type of education and training programmes offered in higher education institutions, should it cater to the immediate job requirements/opportunities available in the industry, or world of work or to concentrate on scientific principles for creation of new knowledge, for developing scientific curiosity leading to research, development and innovation. This calls for fundamental reforms in knowledge market and redefining the relationship with government, industry, business and potential students themselves.

### **3. Strategies to be Adopted for Providing Higher Education Opportunities**

To ensure meaningful rates of graduation i.e. to enhance the ratio of students entering higher education (i.e. Colleges and Universities) the strategies to be adopted are:

**(a) at Institutional level:** Carryout educational planning systematically, establish good linkages between secondary education (feeder institutions) and tertiary education, develop need based and innovative programmes and improve the curricula of the programmes offered, both in terms of their relevance to modern technological needs of industry and providing for job opportunities, flexibility in study plans and sustained support for research, development and innovation, interaction with industries, trade, commerce and society.

**(b) at Faculty level:** Faculty needs to be continuously trained and developed in new and innovative pedagogical skills; and motivated to carryout research, development and innovation integrating suitably with the Teaching-Learning process.

**(c) at External level:** Expanding job opportunities, developing physical infrastructural facilities, setting up of industries, recognizing expansion in higher education as a national priority, better governance and providing conducive atmosphere for industrial growth and development by Government and private participation.

#### **4. Key Performance Indicators of Higher Education:**

The Key Performance Indicators of Higher Education in any country are:

- No. of institutions of higher learning/colleges and universities established in the country.
- No., type, range and diversity of programmes offered in the higher education institutions
- No. of students entering and graduating from Higher Education institutions.
- Proportion of funds allocated for Higher Education as a ratio (%) of GDP.

In India, public spending (i.e. Govt. spending) on general education as % of GDP in 2010 is only 3.7%, out of this, amount spent in higher education is only 0.6%, and only recently the % earmarked for general education has been enhanced to 6.0% of GDP.

- Increase in the % of students from secondary education system entering higher education i.e. Colleges, Universities on year-to-year basis.
- Earning capacity of graduates coming out of Higher Education institutions at entry level jobs.
- No. of Patents and IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) filed and registered by Colleges/Universities for commercial/market Development, and no. of papers published in national and International journals.

India, to improve its higher education, needs more and more universities. The Knowledge Commission had recommended establishment of 1500 Universities to accommodate the growing number of students aspiring for higher education.

However, the no. of good colleges and universities remains stagnant leading to fierce competition amongst all eligible students.

#### **5. Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER)**

According to the theory proposed by the American Sociologist Prof. Martin Trow in 1973, higher education in any country passes through 3 distinct stages of development: elite, mass and universal student access, respectively corresponding to GER (Gross Enrollment Ratio) of less than 15% (representing elite), between 15%-50% (representing mass enrollment) and above 50% (universal access). [6] At present our (India's) Gross Enrollment Ratio in higher education is abysmally low at 11-12%,

whereas the world average is approximately 27%. It may be interesting to note that higher education in India is accessible and is still restricted to, “elite” only, whereas China is moving fast towards “mass higher education” At the same time, aspects like affordability, accessibility, inclusiveness, quality and equity are also to be considered in establishing new institutions of higher learning.

## **6. Higher Education leads to Economic and Social Development**

A significant factor contributing to the economic and social development of any nation is its educational system, founded on the philosophy that it is the right of every one to have an education. But only a few countries, such as India has enacted and passed the Right to Education Bill (though only recently) that too upto school level [7]. Right to education leads to a development of a system of education that will provide opportunities for all to pursue their education, develop certain professional skills and secure a gainful employment leading to individuals livelihood, and at the same time becoming part of nation building activity.

Education creates “Human Capital”. Reforms in education are accurate signals of individual productivity. A comprehensive review of the literature suggest that there is a compelling evidence that education increases productivity, and moreover higher education is the most important phase of education for economic growth in developed countries. Increase in investment in higher education is found to be positively and significantly related to per capita income growth. The review also found that education is highly likely to give rise to further indirect effects on growth by stimulating more effective use of resources and more physical capital investment and technology adoption.

Higher education is indeed important for economic and social development of any country. Today’s Higher Education institutions have wide missions; they educate and train a broad set of professionals, they participate in the development of knowledge, and both the knowledge created and the experts educated are relevant in meeting the needs of the society. Colleges, universities and Higher Education institutions are agents of both economic and social development and transformation.

### **(a) Economic Development**

The most common measure of economic development is the country’s national income (GNP), total value of its production of goods and services; the real national income per head), i.e. per capita income. Economic development results in increase in the real income and consumption by the populace across all the countries in the world as a whole.

Higher education system, especially, engineering, technology and professional education is capable of producing competent and qualified engineers, scientists, technologists, computer programmers, software professionals, doctors and other professionals possessing the necessary knowledge and skills that are in demand by the industries, trade world of work and society.

### **(b) Social Development**

Social development refers to safety, health and welfare of the people across all strata of society viz. children, workers, vulnerable sections of the society, women and the general public, free from pollution and degradation of environment and enjoying sustainable development and reasonable standard of living. Economic and social development calls for an holistic and comprehensive approach.

## **7. Challenges facing Higher Education**

### **(a) High Investment is called for:**

Providing higher education opportunities for large proportion of the country's populace calls for considerable financing and huge investment, both in terms of physical infrastructure, faculty and human resources. Obviously, this investment can't come entirely from Government resources (public funding) and hence robust public-private partnership models are to be conceived, designed and executed. Private sector participation in higher education needs to be recognized and encouraged. Large investment is needed to increase the access to higher education and to increase the Gross Enrollment Ratio, good governance with an eye on quality is also simultaneously required.

Higher Education institutions already established, public or private, should be given generous financial support and **adequate autonomy freeing them from the shackles of Governmental control.**

### **(b) Equity and Inclusiveness:**

Bringing about equity and inclusiveness is another challenge. Providing higher education opportunities for people coming from all strata of society, lower economic groups and rural areas, women and first generation higher education learners is a gigantic task which the Government is facing in most of the developing economies.

### **(c) Providing the Relevant education and training:**

To realize the advantages of the demographic dividend viz. high proportion of working-age population in the country, such as India, a judicious combination of education and skill training meeting the immediate job requirements and long-term objectives of higher education is required. It is indeed a challenge to the curriculum planners and educational administrators at the College and University level. It has been observed and pointed out that higher education should not be just for the sake of acquiring abstract higher knowledge but should be of practical relevance and should be capable of solving countries' problems such as food, affordable housing and transport, clean energy, water, sanitation, health, environment and ecology. Higher education should lead to economic development of the region and the country as a whole.

The programmes offered at higher institutions should be need based resulting in community development. Higher education must aim at making a difference in the lives of the people. Globalization has a very significant impact on India and it is all the more necessary to ensure relevance of higher education in order to achieve excellence.

**(c) High Drop Out Rate**

An observable phenomenon in Higher Education is the heavy drop out rate, which is approximately between 25-50% especially in Arts, Science and Commerce courses. However, in respect of professional education such as engineering, technology and medicine the drop out rate is considerably low, less than 2%.

**(e) Acute Faculty Shortage**

Another cause for alarm is faculty shortage of about 30% in colleges, universities and Higher Education institutions.

**Conclusion:**

Reaching global standards is, perhaps, the task at hand for all the Asian Universities and Higher Education institutions as the necessity to internationalize higher education is increasing. The international monopolies of U.S. and Europe in higher education in terms of enrollments have taken the downward trend and hence, **there is scope for Asian Countries to emerge as global leaders in the new era, especially in the fields of higher education and economy.** Asian Universities are now driven by the external forces towards higher growth and development.

However, there are certain challenges for Asian Higher Education System to emerge as global leaders. The perceived challenges are huge investments, providing relevant education and training, shortage of qualified and competent faculty, equity and inclusiveness, affordability and access consistent with quality standards which are normally expected of higher education system. In addition to Government funding, robust models of public-private participation should be evolved, built and executed for sustained growth and development of higher education sector in Asian countries.

**Appendix 1**  
**Quantitative Expansion of Higher Education**

(GER) %

Country	Year 1965	Year 2000
Korea	6	72
Australia	16	63
Japan	13	46
Singapore	10	34 (as per 1995, statistics)
Thailand	2	32
Philippines	19	30
Malaysia	2	23
<b>India</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12 (as per 2011, statistics)</b>
Indonesia	3	11 (as per 1995, statistics)
Vietnam	-	10
China	-	7

**Appendix 2**  
**Share of enrollment in private higher education**

Philippines	85%
Korea	77%
Japan	73%
<b>India</b>	<b>58%</b>
Bangladesh	56%
Thailand	18%
Malaysia	8%
Pakistan	2%



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